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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, March 17, 2023, at 11 a.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2023

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mrs. MURRAY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Our Father, in whose patient hands the mighty seasons move with quiet beauty, we acknowledge today our great need for Your guidance. Lord, we are challenged by complexities that require more than human wisdom. We sometimes feel like children, grasping in the darkness, lost without light.

Bless this government of the people, for the people, and by the people. Guide its leaders to strive to possess that righteousness that exalts a nation. Enlighten our Senators with Your wisdom, lest the darkness of our times hide the paths of Your providence.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Brent Neiman, of Illinois, to be a Deputy Under Secretary of the Treasury.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WELCH). The majority leader is recognized.

RAIL SAFETY

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this morning, I sent a letter to the National Transportation Safety Board Chair, Jennifer Homendy, urging her to expand NTSB's investigation of Norfolk Southern into a comprehensive review of all seven class I freight railroad companies' safety practices.

Though the NTSB is currently investigating the toxic derailment in East Palestine and Norfolk Southern's questionable safety culture, I want to make something very clear: Norfolk Southern isn't the only rail company that has spent years lobbying to loosen regulations, neglect safety upgrades, and lay off workers.

Norfolk Southern is just one example of a dangerous, industry-wide trend

within the rail industry that puts profits over people's safety.

In the last 5 years alone, there have been over 26,500 accidents and incidents in the rail industry, but instead of prioritizing safety, the industry cut over 30,000 employees from the workforce—roughly 20 percent.

We need the NTSB to expand its investigation because the current data can only tell part of the story. The data tells us how many accidents have occurred, but we want to know if they occurred in populated areas and how many gallons of oil were spilled or which toxic chemicals were released.

We also need to know which of these accidents occurred because the tracks were severely degraded or poorly designed.

We also want to know which negligent company policies contributed to the 2,700 deaths in recent years and if any of those could have been prevented.

These are just some of the questions that my letter asks—ones that can only be answered by a complete, comprehensive, and rigorous investigation of the rail freight industry.

I hope NTSB expands its investigation to include the safety practices and culture of all class I freight railroads. It is a necessary step to assure Americans that freight rail safety will improve.

In the meantime, I again commend my colleagues Senators BROWN and VANCE of Ohio and FETTERMAN and CASEY of Pennsylvania for introducing bipartisan legislation to improve rail

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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safety and provide a check on the railroad industry. I will continue working with them to move it forward.

H.R. 1

Mr. President, now, on the House Republicans' H.R. 1, today, House Republicans are rolling out a partisan, dead-on-arrival, and unserious proposal for addressing America's energy needs that they have laughingly labeled H.R. 1. It is a nonstarter in the Senate.

Republicans' so-called energy proposal is as bad and as partisan as it gets. H.R. 1 will lock America into the most expensive and volatile dirty sources of energy and will set America back a decade or more in our transition toward clean, affordable energy.

Even a brief glance at the House GOP proposal is enough to show it is not a serious package. The package is a wish list for Big Oil, gutting important environmental safeguards on fossil fuel projects, while doing none of the important permitting reforms that would help bring transmission and clean energy projects online faster.

Considering America's serious energy challenges—and not to mention the disruptions caused by the war in Ukraine—it is bewildering to see House Republicans waste time on a Big Oil wish list, instead of taking our energy needs seriously, and ignoring clean energy as they do.

Thankfully, many Democrats and Republicans understand that the only way we will pass a genuine energy package this Congress is through bipartisan cooperation. I am glad that there are good-faith talks underway right now between both parties in both Houses to figure out what sort of permitting deal is possible.

I strongly support these efforts because Americans should not have to go broke just to meet their daily energy needs. We should work on a comprehensive, bipartisan permitting package that can secure enough votes to pass the Congress and reach the President's desk.

Any serious permitting package must also focus on the needs of the future. As America transitions to clean energy, we need to take steps in Congress to ease that transition and ensure clean energy is reliable, accessible, and, most importantly, affordable. That includes efforts to expedite the onshoring and construction of industries critical to our economic and national security, like work we did in CHIPS and Science. Permitting reform is an essential step toward laying the foundation for a clean energy future, and Republicans must work with Democrats on a package that meets this challenge, if we are going to get anything done.

What House Republicans have come up with, in the meantime, is something that falls pathetically short.

RUSSIA

Mr. President, on Russia, on the same day Russian aircraft intercepted and forced down a U.S. surveillance drone in the Black Sea, it was trou-

bling to hear some on the hard right not condemn Putin so much as excuse him—the hard right, excusing Putin, not even daring to condemn him.

One Republican Governor, in particular, said yesterday that defending Ukraine and opposing Putin is not of vital national interest. He called Putin's illegal and unprovoked invasion of another sovereign democracy a "territorial dispute." He basically thinks the United States is wrong to support Ukraine as they fight and die to protect their democracy, and he is certainly not alone in thinking that on the hard right.

I have to wonder what he would have thought if he was around in the 1930s. We know what happened then, when many refused to stand up to aggression—a world war resulted.

Sadly, these remarks are not unique within the GOP. For years, an isolationist fever has been surging within the hard right, propagated night after night on networks like FOX News. The hard right's isolationism is dangerous. It is un-American, undemocratic, and it is woefully blind to the lessons of history.

It is ironic that many on the hard right, which historically opposed communism and authoritarianism, now openly flirt with autocrats like Putin.

These MAGA isolationists are making America less safe. They are making our troops less safe, and they are severely undermining American leadership on the world stage. This desire to excuse and validate Putin's goals is one of the many terrible legacies of Donald Trump, and it is as good a reason as any why he and those who think like him should never ever come near the Oval Office ever again.

AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE

Mr. President, finally on AUMF, yesterday, we took a very important procedural step to set up a vote tomorrow on legislation officially—and finally—repealing the Iraq AUMF of 1991 and 2002.

I want to thank Senators KAINE and YOUNG for leading this bipartisan legislation and Chairman MENENDEZ and Ranking Member RISCH for moving it through the Foreign Relations Committee.

I have said it before and I will say it again: Every year we keep these AUMFs on the books is just another chance for future administrations to abuse or misuse them beyond their original intent.

War powers belong squarely in the hands of Congress. That is what the Constitution says. It means it is our responsibility to reassert our constitutional duty and prevent future Presidents from exploiting these AUMFs to bumble us into a new Middle East conflict. It is important.

The Iraq war ended over 10 years ago. The authorization passed in 2002, under entirely different circumstances and in a different world. It is no longer necessary nor relevant in 2023. Repealing the AUMF will in no way hinder our

national defense nor will it impact our relationship with the people of Iraq.

Americans are tired of endless wars in the Middle East. We owe it to them and we owe it to our veterans and their families to repeal the Iraq war AUMF and turn the page on this chapter of our history.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

BUDGET

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, inflation numbers for February came out yesterday morning, and they confirmed what every American knows: We are still squarely in the middle of Democrats' inflation crisis, with no end in sight.

Overall, inflation was up 6 percent in February compared to a year ago and a staggering 15 percent since President Biden took office—15 percent. Grocery prices were up 10.2 percent in February compared to a year ago and 20 percent since President Biden took office. Electricity prices were up 12.9 percent. Utility gas service was up 14.3 percent. Rent prices were up 8.8 percent. And the list goes on. Overall, energy prices have increased by 37.2 percent since President Biden took office—37.2 percent.

Again, there is no end in sight to this crisis. Digging out of an inflation crisis like this isn't easy, but there are things we can and should be doing to help, like restraining government spending, unleashing American energy production to help drive down energy prices, and growing the economy. These are the things President Biden should be pursuing. But, as the President's budget last week made clear, the President hasn't learned anything from the last 2 years. President Biden and congressional Democrats helped create our current inflation crisis with their \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan spending spree. And what does President Biden have planned in his budget? More reckless government spending—a lot more reckless government spending.

Our last Federal budget before the pandemic was in 2019. That year, total Federal spending was \$4.4 trillion. Over the last 3 years, COVID and then Democrats' profligate spending pushed up the size of the Federal budget to levels in excess of \$6 trillion. So \$4.4 trillion in 2019 before the pandemic, \$6 trillion at the conclusion of the pandemic, and two big reconciliation bills passed along party lines by Democrats. But the need for extra COVID dollars is long over.

Given the economic havoc Democrats' reckless spending has created, you would think Democrats would be looking to return the budget to somewhere approaching pre-COVID levels,